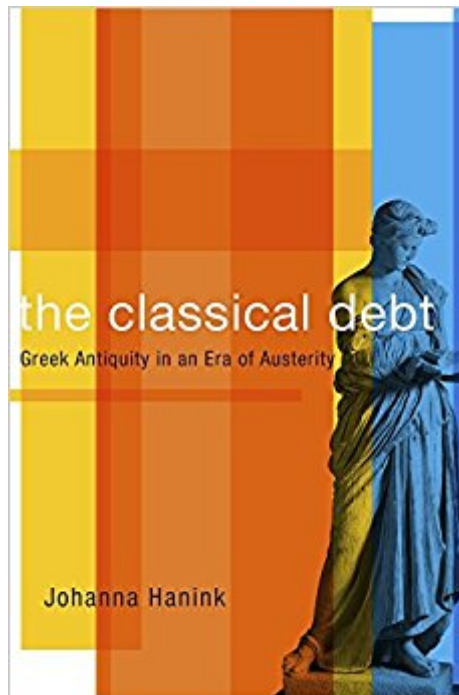




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The Classical Debt: Greek Antiquity In An Era Of Austerity



Synopsis

Ever since the International Monetary Fund's first bailout of Greece's sinking economy in 2010, the phrase "Greek debt" has meant one thing to the country's creditors. But for millions who claim to prize culture over capital, it means something quite different: the symbolic debt that Western civilization owes to Greece for furnishing its principles of democracy, philosophy, mathematics, and fine art. Where did this other idea of Greek debt come from, Johanna Hanink asks, and why does it remain so compelling today? The Classical Debt investigates our abiding desire to view Greece through the lens of the ancient past. Though classical Athens was in reality a slave-owning imperial power, the city-state of Socrates and Pericles is still widely seen as a utopia of wisdom, justice, and beauty—an idealization that the ancient Athenians themselves assiduously cultivated. Greece's allure as a travel destination dates back centuries, and Hanink examines many historical accounts that express disappointment with a Greek people who fail to live up to modern fantasies of the ancient past. More than any other movement, the spread of European philhellenism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries carved idealized conceptions of Greece in marble, reinforcing the Western habit of comparing the Greece that is with the Greece that once was. Today, as the European Union teeters and neighboring nations are convulsed by political unrest and civil war, Greece finds itself burdened by economic hardship and an unprecedented refugee crisis. Our idealized image of ancient Greece dangerously shapes how we view these contemporary European problems.

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Customer Reviews

Hanink helps us see modern Greece through the eyes of a classicist, and ancient Greece through the eyes of a keen observer of modern Greece – a wonderful and winning combination. The Classical Debt is a clever meditation on if, and why, antiquity still matters. (Mary Beard, author of the New York Times bestseller SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome) Hanink's new book depicts the pernicious intertwining of Classics with Orientalism during the worst of the Greek economic crisis. Antigone's determination to violate unjust laws suddenly acquires a fresh interpretation in our post-Brexit Europe. (Yanis Varoufakis, author of And the Weak Suffer What They Must? and former Greek Minister of Finance) An immensely well-written and provocative book, Johanna Hanink's The Classical Debt: Greek Antiquity in an Era of Austerity tightly weaves together the threads of past and present like an ancient Greek warp-weighted loom. (Europe Now 2017-06-01)

Johanna Hanink is Associate Professor of Classics at Brown University.

The author did a very shallow study of the topic, not to mention she did not get many of her facts right - her knowledge of modern Greece from the Greek Revolution 1821 to the near present is absent (e.g. Capodistrias was not the prime minister of Greece - but president, and there is hardly a mention of Trikoupis nor of Venezelos and the phenomenal economic progress of Greece compared to neighboring Balkan countries under these two statesmen). There is hardly an economic description of the collapse of the modern Greek economy. She is also overly repetitious of the debt of modern Europe to just the "Athenian" and particularly the buildings on the Acropolis, contribution to western civilization. Also there is no mention at all of how the Greeks were viewed by the Romans during the many centuries of the Roman Empire, and nothing of how the Byzantines viewed the classical Greek "debt". Also her survey of modern European travelers is fixated on the shallow descriptions of George Wheler in the 17th century, and comparison with the Turk Evliya's excitement on visiting the ruins of Athens in the same century. The latter travel description is liking getting excited about a large mud hut in Ethiopia!

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